Published on *Gay-Straight Alliance Network* (http://gsanetwork.org)

Franken Tells GSAs He Needs Votes for Anti-discrimination Measure

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Jan. 25, 2012
The Advocate
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Today marked the first annual National Gay-Straight Alliance Day, and several of the groups across the country heard from Sen. Al Franken on his anti-discrimination bill's prospects of passing through Congress and bringing change to their schools.

Franken, D-Minnesota, reintroduced the Student Non-Discrimination Act in the Senate late last year, which would make it illegal for schools to discriminate based on sexual orientation. But he said during a conference call today with GSA chapters across the nation that despite 34 co-sponsors, he still needs heavy support for the bill if it's going to reach the 60 senators needed for approval.

“Our laws say nothing about sexual orientation or gender identity,” Franken said during the call. “My bill would fix this. It will ban discrimination in schools based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Believe it or not, that is not illegal right now.”

National GSA Day celebrates groups nationwide seeking to end bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Franken spoke of the strides GSAs have made but said there’s still work to be done to ensure federal protection for LGBT students.

The GSA Network provides support within schools for LGBT students and is currently in 35 states across the nation with more than 870 chapters in California alone.

"National GSA Day is a time to celebrate the contributions made by Gay Straight Alliance clubs all over the country," said Franken in a statement sent to The Advocate. "GSA clubs make schools safer and provide a supportive community for LGBT students, who are bullied far more

frequently than other students

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan released a video celebrating the day and praised the work of GSAs, calling harassment and bullying "serious, serious problems."

"We have to dispel the myth that bullying is somehow just a normal rite of passage or an inevitable part of growing up," he said, noting that President Obama shares his feelings on the issue of safety in schools.

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